freedom to fix service charges for various types of services rendered by them. In order to ensure transparency in banking services, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued instructions to banks on 16th May, 2006, to display and update the details of various service charges in the prescribed format on their websites and in their offices/branches. While fixing the service charges, the banks are expected to ensure that the charges are reasonable, consistent with the cost of providing the services and that the customers with low value/volume of transactions are not penalized. Further, vide its instructions dated 20th July, 2006, RBI has advised the banks that the service charges and fees may be placed on the home page of their websites at a prominent place under the title of 'Service Charges and fees' so as to facilitate easy access to the bank customers.

Further, as a part of its process of bringing in transparency in the service charges levied by banks for money transfers through Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) and National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT), RBI periodically collects data relating to service charges levied by banks to their customers and places the data on its website. The examination of these service charges has shown that there is no wide variation between the service charges levied by different banks, irrespective of the catetory to which they belong.

RBI has, vide its circular dated 10.3.2008, advised a framework of service charges for use of Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) for cash withdrawal and balance enquiry. As per this framework, the banks will not levy any service charge for use of ATMs by their own customers for any purpose and for use of other bank ATMs for balance enquiries. Further, the banks are not to increase the charges prevailaing as on 23rd December, 2007 for use of other bank ATMs for cash withdrawals, reduce the charges to a maximum of Rs. 20/- per transaction by 31st March, 2008 and no service charges w.e.f. 1st April, 2009.

The banks are also required to provide a complaint form alongwith the name of the nodal officer for redressal of the complaint, on the homepage itself to facilitate complaint submission by the customers.

Introduction of Wealth Tax

3780. SHRI MOINUL HASSAN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is considering to introduce Wealth Tax in view of the enormous accumulation of wealth by a tiny segment of the population; and

(b) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) Under the Wealth Tax Act, 1957, wealth tax is already charged in respect of the net wealth of every individual, Hindu Undivided Family and company. The tax is imposed at the rate of one per cent on the amount by which the net wealth exceeds Rs. 15 lakhs.

(b) In view of (a) above, does not arise.

Foreign debt

†3781. SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the foreign debt on the country as on date;

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) the status of India among the debt ridden countries of the world;

(c) the per capita burden of foreign debt at present;

(d) the total amount paid to foreign money lenders as principal amount and as interest in each year during the last three years, country-wise and institution-wise; and

(e) the steps taken to reduce the debt burden of the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) According to the latest available information, India's total external debt amounted to US $ 201.45 billion (Rs. 794,017 crore) as at end-December, 2007.

(b) India ranked fifth among the indebted developing countries of the world (as of 2006), according to the external debt statistics given in World Bank's 'Global Development Finance Online Database'.

(c) As per the revised figures on external debt, the per capita foreign debt at end-March 2007, worked out to US $ 151 or Rs. 6,593.

(d) The country and institution-wise break-up of principal and interest payments is available for Government debt, the details of which are given for the last three years in the Table below:

Table: Principal and interest payments (on Government account)

(Rs. in crore)

Country/Institution	2004-05		2005-06		2006-07	
	Principal	Interest	Principal	Interest	Principal	Interest
A. Multilateral (i to iv)	3,228	1,508	3,529	1,796	4,139	2,522
(i) Asian Development Bank	66	212	112	277	212	522
(ii) International Bank for Reconstruction & Development	485	334	595	683	887	1,135
(iii) International Development Association	2,619	948	2,766	822	2,990	851
(iv) Others	58	14	56	14	50	14
B. Bilateral (i to vi)	3,874	1,465	3,469	1,360	3,747	1,344
(i) Germany	531	100	447	83	421	86
(ii) France	225	72	202	62	219	62
(iii) Japan	2,195	1,099	2,172	992	2,516	946
(iv) Russian Federation	233	76	191	121	168	159
(v) USA	514	115	451	100	420	90
(vi) Others	176	2	6	2	3	1
TOTAL (A+B)	7,102	2,973	6,998	3,156	7,886	3,866

(e) Prudent external debt management policy of the Government aims to maintain external debt within manageable limits. This includes emphasis on raising sovereign loans on concessional terms with longer maturities, pre-paying high cost loans, rationalising interest rates on NRI deposits, restricting end-use of external commercial borrowings, monitoring of short-term debt and encouraging non-debt creating capital flows.